



GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Introduction

Virtually every Iowa community, large and small, is defined by the strength of its public schools. Quality schools attract families and businesses, and serve as the social hub of neighborhoods or even entire towns. That means nearly every member of the community has a stake in making sure our schools remain vital centers of learning, with superior academics and facilities.

Yet public schools often have limited budgets, reduced staff and aging buildings – and are finding it increasingly difficult to meet community demands as well as student needs.

Forging community partnerships – making connections between schools, businesses, and other community organizations – is one solution to help ensure schools retain their strength.

Nationwide, school partnerships have seen a large expansion in scope and number since the 1990s. Across the country today, nearly 70 percent of school districts report partnerships with 3.4 million volunteers serving 35 million students with a value to schools of \$2.4 billion.

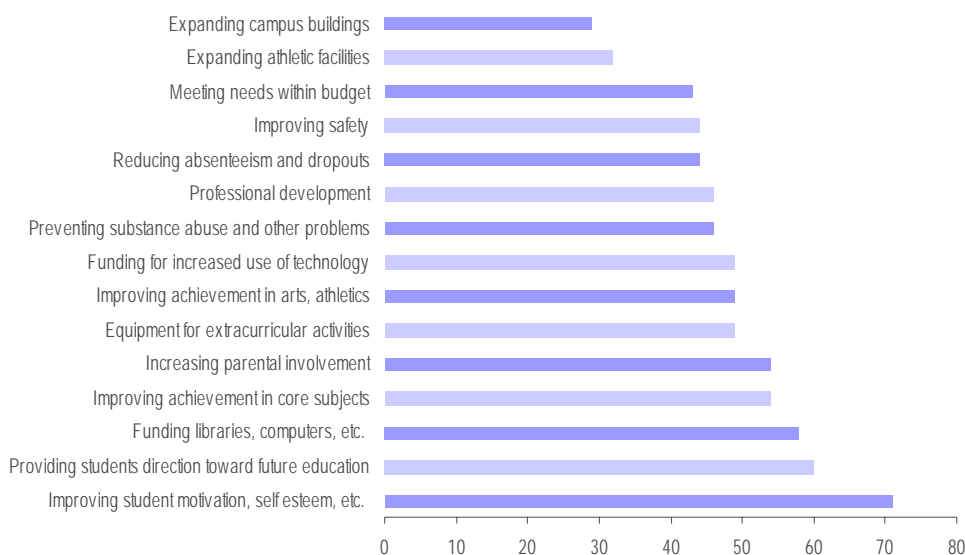
Partnerships have increased not just because of school need, but also because schools have done a better job of demonstrating how they benefit students, the community, and the partners themselves.

- **Students benefit from the professional expertise offered by partners and internships as well as funding for programs or equipment resulting in improved skills, higher test scores and grades, stronger motivation, and better direction toward future goals.**
- **Communities benefit when families stay or move in, businesses flourish, and the economy grows.**
- **Partners benefit from a better skilled workforce, better community relations and customer loyalty, and a stronger community in which to operate or live.**

Finding the Right Partner and Making It Work

Schools seeking a community partner should first consider two primary factors – their own needs and the kinds of partners available in the community – and then be prepared to craft a partnership plan that shows how each partner will contribute, the expected benefits, and how the benefits will be measured.

1. **Identify the school and student needs. Gather input from a variety of people inside and outside the school building to get the best perspective on student needs. School leaders might start by identifying the key improvement areas and determining what resources are needed to make the improvements.**
 - For instance, if reducing the dropout rate is a goal, then a school might need mentors, after-school programs or updated equipment that keeps students' interest.
 - Think in terms of resources that are needed – teachers, computers, books, a baseball diamond – not funding that is needed. Your eventual partner will help you craft a plan to acquire what you need.



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EDUCATORS CONSIDER STUDENT DEVELOPMENT TO BE THE MOST VALUABLE OUTCOME OF PARTNERSHIPS.

When asked what types of partnerships are most valuable, the majority of educators (72%) identify those designed to improve student motivation and 60% say that providing students direction in future education is either extremely or very important.

2. Identify the kinds of partners available in the community. Group them into categories such as nonprofits, educational, health care, manufacturing, high-tech, financial, other corporate, private and individual.

- To hone in on the key partnership possibilities, seek out those who have close connections already to the school – e.g., employers or community groups aligned with a school board member or active parent, or a company that adjoins the school property.
- Remember to include other educational institutions on your list – other high schools, technical schools, and colleges and universities.
- Tentatively determine which of the partners might be able to meet any of the student needs you identified, and use this as a guide when you meet with the potential partners.
- Contact your district's attorney to determine whether you have any limitations with regard to partnerships and which kinds of partnerships need "legal" documentation.

3. Contact an entity within each category and ask to meet with them to discuss the possibility of a partnership.

- Timing is important because many organizations make their community involvement decisions once a year when they do their budgets (at the beginning of either the calendar year or the fiscal year).
- Regardless, your first meeting(s) should be focused on getting to know each other and understanding each other's strategic goals (separate from the partnership) in order to better determine whether a partnership makes sense.

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4. Draft a proposal for review by interested parties.

- Remember, corporations especially appreciate structure and evaluation, so make sure those are included in your proposal.
- The draft proposal is generally an outline, so it should be a simple one-page document. If the parties agree in principle to the proposal, the resulting partnership plan should provide the necessary details.
- Provide options for what the partner can provide to help the school meet its needs. If you need after-school programs, the options may be mentors and tutors, coaches, teachers, equipment, and transportation home for the students. Then clarify what the partner will be willing to contribute to help the school meet its goals.

5. When general agreement is reached, draft a partnership plan that outlines the specific details. The plan doesn't have to be lengthy, but it does need to be clear.

- State the main school goals and benefits in measurable terms. For example, decrease the dropout rate of low-income students by 5 percent by June 2008.
- Include the partner's goals, which should include the school goal as it relates to them. For instance, a reduction in the dropout rate leads to more graduates and more employable youth, which means fewer young adults dependent upon welfare and less crime.
- State the specific contributions of each partner. For instance, if the partner agrees to provide mentors and coaches for after-school programs, the school might agree to provide training for the volunteers. Or if a partner (who also is a fence company) agrees to provide the fence for a baseball field, the school might agree to put a sponsor sign on the fence or provide a number of admission tickets for a specified season.

Resources Partners Can Offer Schools

- Mentors and tutors
- Coaches
- Equipment
- Training for staff
- Expertise for curriculum
- Classroom visits
- Job shadowing
- Internships
- Contests
- Scholarships
- Gift certificates
- Parties
- Funding for special projects
- Help with a special event
- Paid time release
- Political support
- Full-time job opportunities for successful graduates

6. Remember to include steps to monitor, make adjustments, and measure results.

- Partnerships should benefit both parties. Meet with your partner periodically to gauge satisfaction with the progress.
- Discuss how the plan can be changed or improved during the next school year. For instance, the partner might agree that in addition to mentoring and coaching during the after-school programs, it will offer part-time summer jobs to at-risk students – giving the students more meaning to their education and providing the partner with a ready pool of applicants when full-time jobs become available.

Both partners want the alliance to be meaningful.

Asking a business to fund new band uniforms makes more sense if the business sells instruments or has some connection to music.

Likewise, an organization that offers a poster contest that focuses on tornado safety, for instance, makes sense only if the region is prone to tornadoes.

Both partners must feel the partnership is beneficial.

This is not only fair, but also helps ensure survival. If you've proven to your partner how valuable the alliance is to him or her, then the partnership is less likely to be a victim of budget cuts if the partner falls on hard times.

Resources Schools Can Offer Partners

- Better students and citizens
- More employable workforce
- Recognition at events and in written materials
- Singers, dancers, musicians